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# NATURE IN ART.

BY F. EDWARD HULME, F.L.S., F.S.A.

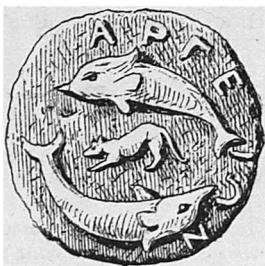
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Even when the animal forms employed fail to illustrate and develop any inner significance, we may not too hastily assume that such is non-existent; it may very possibly be only a lack of some special knowledge on our part that renders the forms meaningless to us, and we may affirm that, in by far the greater number of cases, some symbolism of meaning is involved. The forms had a significance to those who used them that we may or may not comprehend. Where we fail to grasp the idea involved, it will in many cases arise from our inability to enter



into the state of mind of some far-distant people, remote either in chronology or locality, or else that the historical or legendary associations connected with the forms are unknown to us, in the same way that a Zulu getting hold of an English coin, bearing on it the device of a man on horseback spearing some monster, might admire the vigor of action and so forth, but for want of a knowledge of the legend of St. George and the Dragon, would quite fail to understand the motive that led to the adoption of the device. If, then, reasoning from the known to the unknown, we find certain devices—we will say, for example, on early Greek coinage, that, rude as they are, clearly point to some religious belief—are the attribute of some deity, or, like the famous geese whose cackling saved Rome, point to some event in the national history, we may not unreasonably assume that other devices, to us unintelligible, possess no less some inner significance, could we but pierce beneath the surface.

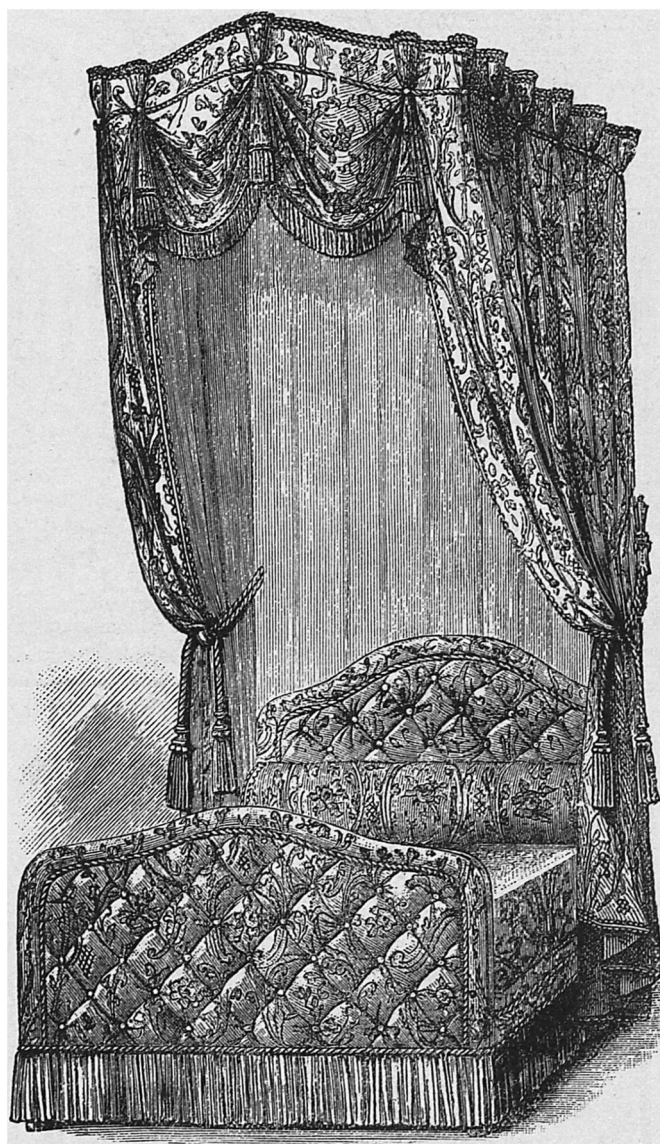
The lion is certainly no more pleasing in outward form than the stag, yet in art we find possibly a thousand of the former to one of the latter: for the lion is associated with the ideas of courage, majesty, magnanimity, and other such-like highly esteemed qualities, while the stag, graceful as it is in form, is regarded as but a timid creature after all—a quality by no means held in high regard. In like manner the eagle figures abundantly, while the gentle dove is rarely seen. These two illustrations suffice to illustrate that it is rather on account of the possession of some qualities that awaken, rightly or wrongly, a sympathy in the human mind, that certain animals are so much more generally introduced than others, and that mere beauty of form and surface attractiveness tells for very little in the choice. The work then, ordinarily, does not charm us so much esthetically as it supplies us with food for reflection, and a desire to penetrate to the thoughts that led to the introduction of the forms employed. As we have already indicated, when the external appearance of the animal is not cared for, but only the significance that has been attached to the creature, the forms are very arbitrary, and often become a kind of shorthand—a something which is understood to stand for a lion or an eagle or what not, but which suggests very little really of the natural appearance of those animals. Heraldry has a good deal to answer for in this respect, as may be seen on inspection of our sketch of the rampant lion, for whoever saw a real lion with a doubly foliated tail, or indeed a foliated tail at all? Whoever in nature saw such fish as the dolphins that the heralds supply us with?



As the forms of animals are introduced so largely on account of some property the creatures symbolize, we naturally find that, when two or more qualities are desired to be exposed that are not ordinarily found in any one animal, the old designers felt no scruple in combining portions of one or more animals together into one whole that expressed the various points required. The result

was of course wholly unnatural; but as nature was not their aim, this was entirely immaterial. Such creatures as the sphinx, or the human-headed bulls of Nineveh, form ready illustrations in their combination of animal strength and human wisdom.

The sphinx is more especially met with in Egyptian and classic art, and again, naturally, in the Renaissance work of France and Italy—work which was avowedly a return to classic types. The sphinx is composite in nature, being in Greek art ordinarily the combination of the head and bust of a woman with the body of a lion. In Egyptian art the leonine body is surmounted by the head of a man, hawk, or other creature, according to the ideas that were to be embodied in the creation. It is a curious point to notice how frequently—in fact, almost entirely—these mythical forms are but compounded of other and natural forms. The new animal is not really a new creation; it is but the aggregation of features derived from natural types, and familiar enough to us in themselves. In cases where such attributes as the courage of the lion or the wisdom of the serpent were to be expressed, the leonine body and claws, or the head of the serpent itself, would evidently best convey the required characteristics to the eye and mind of the beholder. In other cases, as in the chimæra compounded of lion, serpent and goat, where such



FRENCH DESIGN FOR UPHOLSTERED BED.

an employment of the various forms does not so readily convey its meaning, we must not too hastily assume that the combination has no significance because to us it is meaningless.

According to some authorities, the sphinx represented the royal power by its junction in one creation of the highest physical and mental attributes. Pliny, however, states that it is to be taken as the representation of the Nile in flood, which ever regularly takes place under the signs Leo Virgo. As the head in all Egyptian examples is always masculine in type, this theory seems scarcely tenable. In Greek art the sphinx was always winged, and it is never found either so freely or on so large a scale as in the Egyptian remains. It is difficult to say what the exact meaning was that the Greeks or Romans associated with the form, but it seems in any case to have been a form of far less importance to the classic nations than to their predecessors on the banks of the beneficent Nile. The form in either case is so well known that it seems superfluous to give illustrations of it.

Amongst other non-natural forms found in ancient, mediæval, or modern art may be mentioned the sea-horse, sea-lion, phoenix, cockatrice, griffin,

dragon, chimæra, mermaid, wyvern, centaur, unicorn, hydra, pegasus, cerberus, harpy, basilisk, and the like; but as these are just the opposite to what our title, nature in art, may be held to involve, we need now do no more than simply name them.

Having discussed the necessary limitations of treatment attending the proper introduction of animal forms and pointed out the undesirability of mechanical repetition, together with the influence of symbolism and their external considerations, we propose now to consider how far in the art of the past we find use made of these forms.

In the earliest art of which we have any knowledge, that of Egypt, we find animal form constantly recurring. The examples easily divide themselves into three classes, the first of these we may term purely pictorial, the second religious, and the third hieroglyphic. The tombs of the Egyptian monarchs and great men of state consist of a number of chambers, and according to the length of life of the future occupant we find many or few of these, as they were constantly being added to throughout the life of the person for whom they were being prepared, until death summoned him from his throne or earthly rank or priestly office, and consigned him to the innermost recess. All the chambers and passages leading to this were richly painted, though they were hewn in the darkness of the solid rock and closed, as it was thought, for ever when he in whose honor they were constructed was brought to his rest. These paintings were of the most varied character and furnish a rich store of interest, illustrating as they do, not the life of great Pharaoh or the incidents of the life of the person buried there, but a perfect gallery of the life of the day. Hence we learn from these all the details of daily life, the pleasures of the rich and the labors of the poor. We see the soldiers marching in well ordered ranks to battle, fowling pursuing their sport amidst the reeds of the Nile, fishermen casting their nets or using the rod and line, huntsmen shooting gazelles and hares, conjurors performing feats of skill, athletes wrestling or exhibiting feats of strength, dinner parties and the preliminary preparation of the dishes, musical entertainments, the watering, pruning, and other labors of the vineyard, the labors of the blacksmith, the cobbler, the stone carver, the herdsman, the boatman, the glass blower, the potter, everything in fact capable of throwing a light on the life history of this ancient and interesting people. These representations are at once pictorial and decorative. The sculptures would appear to be wholly monumental or religious in aim, we do not, as far as we are aware, find in any statues any incident of daily life, nothing corresponding to the grand "Greek Slave" of Hiram Powers, to John Bull's "Eagle Slayer," or to the perhaps still more popular "Reading Girl," and the group entitled "You Dirty Boy," together with others of similar character, that modern Italian art has shown the world in the various international displays. The polytheistic nature of the national religions influences much of the work, so that we



get a colossal statue of Pasht the cat-headed goddess, or Anubis with his jackal-head and the like, while the numerous litanies of the dead and other written and painted records preserved in the tombs are full of representations of animals, all having religious significance. Many of these are composed of various combinations, such as human



figures having the heads of ibis serpents with human legs and so forth. The third great class of human and animal representations we have termed hieroglyphic. The Egyptians employed two or three forms of character, and a great use is made in it of animal forms treated in a somewhat bold and conventional manner.